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Leader Perspectives of Organizational Growth and Communication

by

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Leader Perspectives of Organizational Growth and Communication

**Approved by
Supervising Committee:**

Dedication

For my parents, who have provided me with endless love and support in this (and every) endeavor; for my sister, who never let me doubt myself, and for Chris, who held my hand through everything.

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May 3, 2006

Abstract

Leader Perspectives of Organizational Growth and Communication

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This study examines the growth phase of the organizational life cycle and its impact on internal and external organizational communication. A qualitative case study of a national nonprofit operating foundation was performed, revealing several changes brought on by the recent growth of the organization. Interviews with the organization's leaders and other members reveal the communicative challenges experienced within the organization. Findings bolster previous claims presented by organizational scholars and highlight the role of communication in the organizational growth process. Further, three hypotheses regarding organizational growth and communication are proposed for future research regarding growth in the field of organizational communication.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction, Rationale, and Literature Review

In a decade of ups and downs, booms and busts, dot coms and dot bombs, we have certainly been privy to the adaptable (and sometimes not-so-adaptable) nature of organizations in our society. We've seen technology companies grow from entrepreneurial start-ups to monstrous corporations. We've seen airlines dwindle from burgeoning businesses to struggling operations. Such struggles with organizational growth and change are not limited to businesses. Government departments, voluntary organizations, schools, and nonprofit organizations also grapple with the issues of growth, decline, and adaptability. With so many organizations changing so quickly, questions abound regarding the nature of organizations and how they adapt to their environment.

Organizations, at their most basic level, represent a group of people who collaborate to fulfill a larger function or mission. They provide the social mechanism necessary to coordinate a large number of people toward some common end (Kimberly & Miles, 1980). While the notion of organizing is a simple one, the reality of the modern-day organization has become quite complex. Mirroring living organisms, organizations seem to have taken on processes, identities, and personalities all their own. Like humans, organizations exist in a continual state of flux (Byers, 1997). They experience different stages of "life," struggling with growing pains, adolescence, even death (Miller & Friesen, 1984). This dynamism makes organizations a subject of intrigue; the large role they now play in our every day lives makes them a subject worthy of investigation.

A significant step in becoming a mature, successful organization is growing large enough to make an impact in the surrounding environment. Even small organizations must grow, at least in revenue or constituency, on order to succeed in fulfilling their goals. This period from inception to the “maturity” of the organization is known as organizational growth. Much like human adolescence, the growth phase is often characterized by organizational scholars as difficult and awkward (Griener, 1972). The decisions made in this phase of the organizational life cycle will shape the enduring character of the organization and limit its future options (Miles & Randolph, 1980). As organizations attempt to make the leap from infancy to maturity, challenges are often encountered. This is evident in the business pages of the daily newspapers, as companies like Netflix or JetBlue struggle to meet new or unexpected demand and fend off impending competitors. Internally, members strive to stay on mission and increase revenue while they lay out strategic plans and processes to stabilize the organization.

In the study of organizations, it is imperative to examine the one element every organization relies on to create a cohesive system: communication (Byers, 1997). Communication connects each person in an organization to every other person in the organization. As organizations grow and change, communication must adapt and change with the organization. While we know that communication is important to the functioning of organizations, and is especially problematic during periods of growth (Starbuck, 1965; Griener, 1972; Miller & Friesen, 1984), studies investigating organizational growth thus far have only mentioned communication in passing. There is a need to understand what is at the root of such difficulties and how communication is impacted by organizational growth. This piece of the organizational puzzle is essential to

a full understanding of the nature of organizations. I argue that to add something new to the organizational growth literature would create new solutions for organizational practitioners navigating periods of growth and new opportunities for theory building for organizational scholars.

This study will look at one organization's experience with growth and communication. I hope to unearth the communicative issues that lie at the root of such growth, ask new questions regarding the nature of organizational growth, and open an avenue for future research in the field of organizational communication. In this chapter, I will begin with a review of the study of organizations, communication, and the life cycle model. I will then discuss the concept of organizational growth and why a communications perspective is important to add to this body of literature. I will conclude with a series of research questions that will be carried through my study.

LITERATURE REVIEW: ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES, COMMUNICATION, AND THE LIFE CYCLE MODEL

For decades, scholars have come from many disciplines to study how organizations grow and change over time (Weinzimmer, Nystrom & Freeman, 1998). Looking at structure and process, these researchers aim to build a better understanding of the characteristics of organizations, how they impact and are impacted by their environment, and what to expect of new organizations (Starbuck, 1965). Although this field has been studied for years, there remains a wealth of information relating to organizational growth and development that has yet to be examined. In fact, it seems much of the literature available on organizational development exists to point out how

much information remains undiscovered. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to take into account what has been discovered about organizational growth and begin to examine a new component of this research: the role of communication during periods of organizational growth.

Evolution of the Organizational Life Cycle

The study of organizations as we know them became popular in the late 19th century with the writings of such individuals as social theorist Max Weber, industrialist Henri Fayol, and engineer Frederick Taylor (Byers, 1997). The first half of the 20th century emphasized theories of management and human relations, theories focusing on control and the behavior of individual members of organizations. In the 1960's, however, scholars began to analyze organizations with a Systems-based approach, recognizing that organizations are complicated systems of related parts interacting and adapting to their environment (von Bertalanffy, 1968). This approach is now known as Systems Theory, and has been quite instrumental in changing the way people view organizations (Deetz, 2001). Rather than seeing them as isolated phenomena, Systems Theory suggests organizations are total and dynamic processes, consisting of a number of variables that constantly interact with one another as well as with their external environment (Almaney, 1974).

As it is necessary to the function of the organization for information to flow between these variables, or subsystems, communication emerges as a major component in Systems Theory. Communication serves to integrate all of the subsystems in an organization in such away that the stability of the whole system can be maintained. It

also links the system to its outside environment, allowing it to adapt to any changes that may occur externally (Almaney, 1974). Systems theory focuses on the continual act of organizing, rather than on the organization itself (Deetz, 2001). In viewing organizations as processes, Systems theory promotes the notion of the organization as organism; a living, growing being capable of adaptation and change. This notion of the organization-as-system encouraged many scholars to create models outlining the lifecycle of organizations.

Organizations are often vastly different from one stage to the next. While the more recent emphasis in organizational studies has been placed on organizations' decline and death (Adler & Chaston, 2002; Whetten, 1987; Cameron, Sutton & Whetten 1988; Weitsal & Jonsson, 1989), earlier writings (discussed below) focused on the developing organization, striving to understand each phase of organizational life and whether such a cycle is common among all organizations.

Organizational development and growth became a popular topic of research with the publication of William Starbuck's *Organizational Growth and Development* (1965), which highlights then-current literature regarding organizational growth and suggests possible fruitful areas of research. Starbuck outlines motives for growth, changes in structure, and the process of formalization that occurs as an organization grows. He also discusses several noted models of growth; among them lays a group of what he labels *metamorphosis models*:

“Metamorphosis models take the view that growth is not a smooth, continuous process, but is marked by abrupt and discrete changes in the conditions for organizational persistence and in the structures appropriate to these conditions... The metamorphosis models describe probable changes in structure when the cumulative, long-run shifts are organizational growth and aging” (489).

These metamorphosis models laid the groundwork for future models mapping the lifecycle of organizations.

In the years that followed, several scholars presented lifecycle models in their writings (see Table 1). While each model follows similar patterns mimicking the human lifecycle of birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death, each model brings a unique set of labels and characteristics to the table. Each of these models explains the changing characteristics of organizations over time (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). While there is no one correct model of the organizational lifecycle (Kimberly, 1980), each model retains the idea of growth and development, either as a stage in the lifecycle, or as the force that moves the organization from one phase to the next.

Organizational Growth and Communication

Unlike human lifecycles, organizational lifecycles may not always follow the birth> maturity> death order; research has shown that they may experience phases in a non-sequential manner (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Regardless, the shift from inception to maturity often entails organizational growth, either through an increase of members, an increase in revenue, or an increase in stakeholders. Though an increase in membership most obviously causes shifts in organizational communication, such an increase is usually a means of obtaining goals like higher revenue or is a side effect of such attainment (Starbuck, 1965). Thus, growth occurs in many forms, but often affects the structure and communication occurring within an organization:

"A company's problems and solutions tend to change markedly as the number of employees and sales volume increase... In addition to increased size, however,

problems of coordination and communication magnify, new functions emerge, levels of management hierarchy multiply, and jobs become more interrelated" (Greiner, 1972, 40).

One only has to diagram the number of connections between members, departments, or subsystems in an organization to see how complicated communication becomes as organizations grow. In the figures below; imagine each circle is an organization, and each point in the circle represents a member of the organization. The first circle represents an organization with 5 members, the second, an organization with 10 members. The amount of communication increases exponentially by adding even five members. Now consider that each circle is a department in an organization, and each department is made of several people; communication becomes even more complicated.

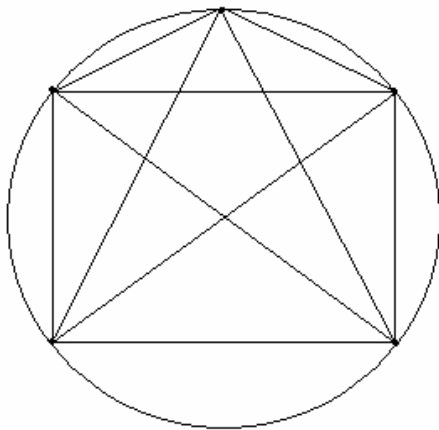


Figure 1.1:
Organization with five members

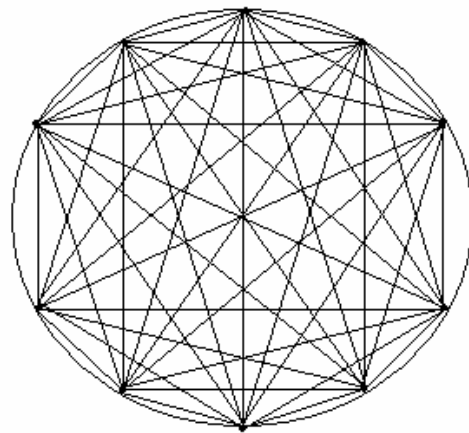


Figure 1.2:
Organization with ten members

More importantly, if one single line of communication in either of these systems breaks down, the entire system can be thrown off balance (Almaney, 1974).

Other documented characteristics of the growth phase may impact or be impacted by organizational communication as well. Such characteristics that have been pointed out by scholars during times of growth are that members' jobs become more specialized (Greiner, 1972), processes become more formalized and institutionalized as hierarchies build (Starbuck, 1965; Greiner, 1972; Kimberly, 1980; Miller & Friesen, 1984), authority is delegated to middle managers (Greiner, 1972, Miller & Friesen, 1984), markets and constituencies are segmented (Miller & Friesen, 1984), motivations for joining the organization may shift from goal orientation to social structure orientation (Starbuck, 1965), physical and psychological distance create subdivision within the organizations (Miles, 1980), and constituencies change with the shifting goals of the organization (Bedeian, 1986). Such observations prime the palate for future studies relating organizational communication and organizational growth.

Systems theory and the organizational lifecycle model bring the role of communication in organizations to the forefront when dealing with growth: "It is not merely an activity occurring within an organization, nor is it merely a tool for organizational control. Rather communication defines the organization. It is the means through which the subsystems organize themselves and work together" (Byers, 1997). Relying heavily upon communication to be the conduit that connects the various subsystems of organizations, this model highlights the importance of communication and its study in the context of organizations through various stages of life.

Though communication is mentioned in passing in by several organizational scholars as an important and problematic element during times of growth, few, if any, scholars have taken the time to examine exactly why. Writings on organizational growth

have noted that communication aids the development and maintenance of organizational purposes (Guetzkow, 1965), that communication becomes more formalized during periods of growth (Starbuck, 1965), and that communication and coordination become problematic during periods of growth (Greiner, 1972). Even so, these studies have not taken the time to study these matters in depth to discover how and why they occur.

RATIONALE

Organizational growth presents several hurdles for organizational communication scholars. While changes in organizational structure, goals, and decision-making have been examined, none of these studies have emphasized how communication affects and is affected in the organization during periods of growth, perhaps because organizational communication during such periods is difficult to grasp and examine. Understanding the communicative challenges that organizations face could help them prepare for growth in a strategic manner and help them avoid the pitfalls experienced by organizations that have previously undergone periods of growth. In creating a case study of organizational growth and communication, I hope to get at the causes for and implications of such changes in communication during this volatile phase in the organizational life cycle. I also hope to set forth a standard against which other organizations can be compared; such comparisons, as stated by Starbuck (1965) “are likely to yield significant generalizations” which may be applied to organizations of various kinds. In comparing communicative issues encountered by organizations enduring periods of growth, we can discover the communicative challenges common to organizational growth, and develop a model for communication in growing organizations. Thus, organizational scholars will have

models in place for theory-building, and organizational members and practitioners can learn how to achieve more effective communication during times of growth.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Because so few studies exist regarding communication and growth, my research focuses on rather basic questions of organizational growth and communication in order to confirm past theories and to uncover new issues of significance. Although only one organization will be examined in this study, future studies may use this information for comparison and theory-building. To confirm previous postulations of organizational scholars, I ask:

RQ1: What are the main communicative challenges that this organization has encountered relating to its recent growth? What has caused these challenges?

As I begin to examine communication in this organization, I hope to discover how communication helps the organization to adapt to its new phase in life, and determine the impacts that such changes have on the organization as new members are added. In order to do this, I ask:

RQ2: How has communication changed in the organization as it has grown? How have these changes impacted the organization?

I will examine the organization through the lens of the organizational life cycle model, and take in to account communication both within the organization and between the organization and its environment. Finally, I will analyze the data this study provides and attempt to determine ways in which organizations may use this information to cope with organizational growth and minimize communication issues.

The next chapter will outline the organization to be studied and discuss my methods of research.

Table 1: Iterations of the organizational lifecycle

Downs, 1967:	Struggle for Autonomy > Rapid Growth > Deceleration
Lippitt & Schmidt 1967:	Birth > Youth > Maturity
Greiner, 1972:	Creativity> Direction > Delegation > Coordination > Collaboration
Lyden, 1975:	Niche > Innovation > Goal Attainment/Stability > Institutionalization
Scott, 1977:	Stage 1 (no formal structure) > Stage 2 (formalization) > Stage 3 (growth and adaptation)
Katz & Kahn 1978:	Primitive Sytem Stage > Stable Organization Stage > Elaboration of Structure Stage
Quinn & Cameron, 1983:	Entrepreneurial > Collectivity > Formalization > Elaboration of Structure
Miller & Friesen, 1984:	Birth Phase > Growth Phase > Maturity Phase > Revival Phase > Decline Phase
Van de Ven & Poole, 1995:	Startup Birth > Adolescent Growth > Maturity > Decline/Death

CHAPTER TWO: Research Methods

CASE STUDY: THE LANCE ARMSTRONG FOUNDATION

In an effort to uncover the impact of growth on organizational communication, the researcher chose to perform a case study of an organization that had recently undergone a period of growth. Identifying an appropriate organization for this study was serendipitous. The President/Chief Executive Officer of the rapidly growing Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF) appeared as a guest speaker at the University of Texas at Austin during a previous semester. Once a topic of study was selected, the researcher contacted the President/CEO via e-mail and asked if he might volunteer the LAF to be the subject of a case study. After meeting to discuss the study, the CEO and COO granted permission for the organization to participate.

LAF Background and History

Currently a burgeoning nonprofit organization dedicated to cancer survivorship, the Lance Armstrong Foundation found its beginnings in Austin, TX in 1996 as a mission among friends to raise awareness for testicular cancer. The organization's founder and namesake, cyclist Lance Armstrong, began the organization after enduring a life-threatening battle with testicular cancer. Armstrong teamed up with several close friends and cyclists to create the first annual Ride for the Roses. The money raised during the Ride went to seed the newly formed Lance Armstrong Foundation in 1997. Armstrong's long time friend, John Koriath, took on the role of Executive Director and together the two named the first 4 members of the Foundation's voluntary Board of Directors. Soon

thereafter, Koriath opened a small office in a house near downtown Austin. Seeing a need to include a wider audience in their mission, the LAF widened the scope of its mission to include all urological cancer.

The Foundation remained small and unstable in its first few years of operation. Koriath resigned in 1998, replaced by Executive Director Karl Haussman. Haussman hired two more staff members to help run the organization. The Foundation grew slowly and steadily, nearing \$1 Million in assets in 1999. Then Armstrong gained a new level of celebrity by winning the Tour de France in 1999. Armstrong's popularity grew suddenly, as did the Foundation's. The Board hired a consultant to lead a strategic planning process. The consultant suggested moving away from reliance on cycling events and the cycling community for financial support. The organization moved to a "Venture Philanthropy" model and established its "Founder's Circle," asking select individuals to donate \$500,000 over a period of five years. Within the first year, LAF had 20 members in its Founder's Circle who helped create financial stability for the organization and allowed its structure to expand.

In the fall of 2000, Haussman resigned and was replaced by interim (volunteer) Executive Director Jeff Garvey, who had been a member of the Board of Directors from the early days of the Foundation. Garvey grew the organization's staff to 14 employees, expanded its program areas, and moved their offices into a larger house in the hills of Austin. Garvey remained Interim Executive Director until 2002 when the position was filled by Eileen Oldag.

As Armstrong went on to win six more Tour de France races, he became a widely-known celebrity athlete and spokesperson for cancer survivorship. In this spirit,

the organization changed its mission again to encompass all cancer survivors: *Our mission is to inspire and empower people with cancer to live strong. We serve our mission through education, advocacy, public health, and research programs.* At that point LAF unveiled the “LiveStrong” brand. Oldag stepped down from her position and the organization recruited a new leader, Mitch Stoller, to serve as President and CEO in 2003. Soon after his arrival, Stoller engaged in collaborative talks with Nike, resulting in an in-kind donation in the form of 5 million yellow wristbands with the word “LiveStrong” imprinted on them. The Foundation was to “sell” 1 million wristbands for a donation of \$1 apiece, and Nike would sell the other 4 million and donate the proceeds to the LAF.

The Growth of the LAF

Little did the Foundation (or Nike) know, but the yellow wristband would soon become recognized world-wide as a symbol of support for Armstrong and for cancer survivorship. First worn mostly by cancer survivors and cycling enthusiasts, the yellow wristband has become enormously popular, gracing the wrists of millions of people, including politicians and celebrities. To date, the Foundation has sold over 60 million yellow Livestrong wristbands.

Armstrong’s success as a cyclist and the fad-like popularity of the Livestrong wristband catapulted LAF into the limelight. The staff of the organization soon found itself inundated with new donors, new volunteers, and even more requests for wristbands. More staff was needed to accommodate this influx, and more space was needed to

accommodate the new staff. The offices of the LAF moved again into an office building in Austin, and eventually expanded into three separate office spaces within the building. Today, LAF continues to grow in staff, constituency, and financial assets, although the rate of growth has begun to slow. The staff of the organization has nearly doubled every year since inception. Currently, the LAF employs 73 staff members. There are no plans to double this number again in the next 12 months, although the organization's leaders admit that some growth is still expected this year.

Financially, the organization has grown from less than \$250,000 in assets in 1997 to over \$60 Million at the end of 2005. This financial growth is attributed to investments, private donations, fundraising and cycling events, and sales of the Livestrong wristband and other Livestrong branded products. The Foundation's leaders hope to continue to grow the financial assets of the organization and use them to find new ways to impact the lives of those affected by cancer.

There is no way of knowing how many people have benefited from the tools and information provided by the LAF. What can be measured is the number of people actively engaged with the organization online, or as a donor or volunteer. The LAF began capturing e-mail and mailing addresses in the early days of the organization, and today they have a database of 2.1 million constituents. Currently, programs are aimed at capturing more information about the constituents who come to the organization looking for survivorship resources. Until then, it is impossible to count the number of people utilizing the "Livestrong" resources and to estimate how effective these resources are.

As this organization has grown from a staff of one with a mission of fighting testicular cancer to a staff of 73 dedicated to empowering people affected by cancer,

many changes have taken place. Such growth makes this organization ideal for a study of organizational growth and communication.

DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected through a series of loosely structured, in-depth interviews with members of the organization; each interviewee was informed of the study topic and asked to think about their experiences at the Foundation throughout the interview. The interviews began with questions regarding each participant's position and tenure with the organization and guided them to discuss any changes they have experienced as the organization has grown. Additionally, the researcher observed daily life within the organization during seven site visits and reviewed archival material provided by the organization to create a well-rounded understanding of the history of the organization and the experiences of its members.

Sample

Participants were selected with the help of the CEO and Executive Aide to the CEO based on employees' tenure with the organization to ensure they had witnessed and experienced growth at different stages of the organization. Inclusion in the study also depended upon the participants' willingness to participate and availability to meet. The Executive Aide agreed to schedule interviews with twenty members of the organization. These members were either volunteer or employee workers at varying levels and departments throughout the organization. The sample represents roughly one-third of the organization's members. Participants consisted of a cross-section of organizational

members representing different departmental areas, ages (although all participants were over 18 years of age), ethnicities, professional and organizational tenure, and sex. The main criteria for selecting participants was that each of them had worked with the organization for at least 6 months and have regular contact with other workers in the office. Due to the growth of the organization, the majority of members with this level of tenure had moved into C-level, Director or Associate Director level, or Managerial level within the organization. This unintentionally shifted the focus of the study to leaders' perspectives of growth and communication in the organization. Though proportionally skewed to the higher levels of organizational hierarchy, participants' job function in the organization was fairly evenly spread across the organization (see Table 2).

Procedure

Interviews were performed on site at the organization's offices. Each interview lasted between 25 and 60 minutes and was audio-taped with the participants' permission. The twenty interviews took place during office hours between January 18, 2006 and February 25, 2006. Participants were given a brief synopsis of the purpose of the study and asked a series of questions regarding their experience with organizational growth (appendix A). The interview process was loosely structured to allow participants to expound upon their unique experiences with growth and communication in the organization in their own words. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and add any additional thoughts regarding their experiences. Signed consent forms were collected during the interview and each interviewee was provided with the contact information of the researcher for any follow-up questions or concerns.

Each audio-taped interview was then transcribed, resulting in 200 pages of double-spaced text. In order to organize and interpret the data, the researcher employed a Grounded Theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to data analysis. Grounded Theory was used particularly because of its aim to lend clarity to social phenomena and develop theory out of these phenomena. The interview data was read and interpreted to reveal the main changes and challenges participants faced as a result of the growth of the organization. Categories regarding growth and communication evolved naturally; initially, any statement regarding communication and growth was coded and assigned a category (ex. “Proximity”). Any new statement with a similar sentiment was assigned to that category. After all interviews were read and coded, the number of data pieces under each category was counted to gain consensus from members on that category. The following categories evolved from the data set:

Category	Number of Data Pieces
Narrowing Job Description	8 Instances
Growing Responsibilities	8 Instances
External Communication/Segmentation	13 Instances
Impact of Proximity on Communication	16 Instances
Added Effort of Communicating	19 Instances
Information and Communication Technology	15 Instances
New Leadership Structure	14 Instances
Hierarchy and Communication Channels	7 Instances
Interdepartmental Communication	12 Instances
Formalizing Processes	7 Instances
External Communication	6 Instances
Documentation/Organizational Learning	7 Instances

Table 3: Data Categories

From these data, three further categories were coded to reveal new hypotheses regarding organizational growth and communication: the changing culture of the organization (8 instances), the renewed emphasis on internal communication (9 instances), and the rapid

nature of the growth at LAF (14 instances). The goal of this coding was to confirm currently existing theories of organizational growth through the narratives of organizational members and document new findings relating to communication theory. Data not relating to organizational communication (about 50% of the data) was discarded for the purposes of this study. Discarded data consisted mainly of participants' attitudes toward organizational mission, non-profit status, measurement and accountability, and topics relating to organizational growth, but with no focus communication. The hope in collecting such data was to allow the participant to discuss their unique experiences with organizational growth, and to allow communicative issues to evolve naturally in their narrative. The following chapters will reveal the details of these results.

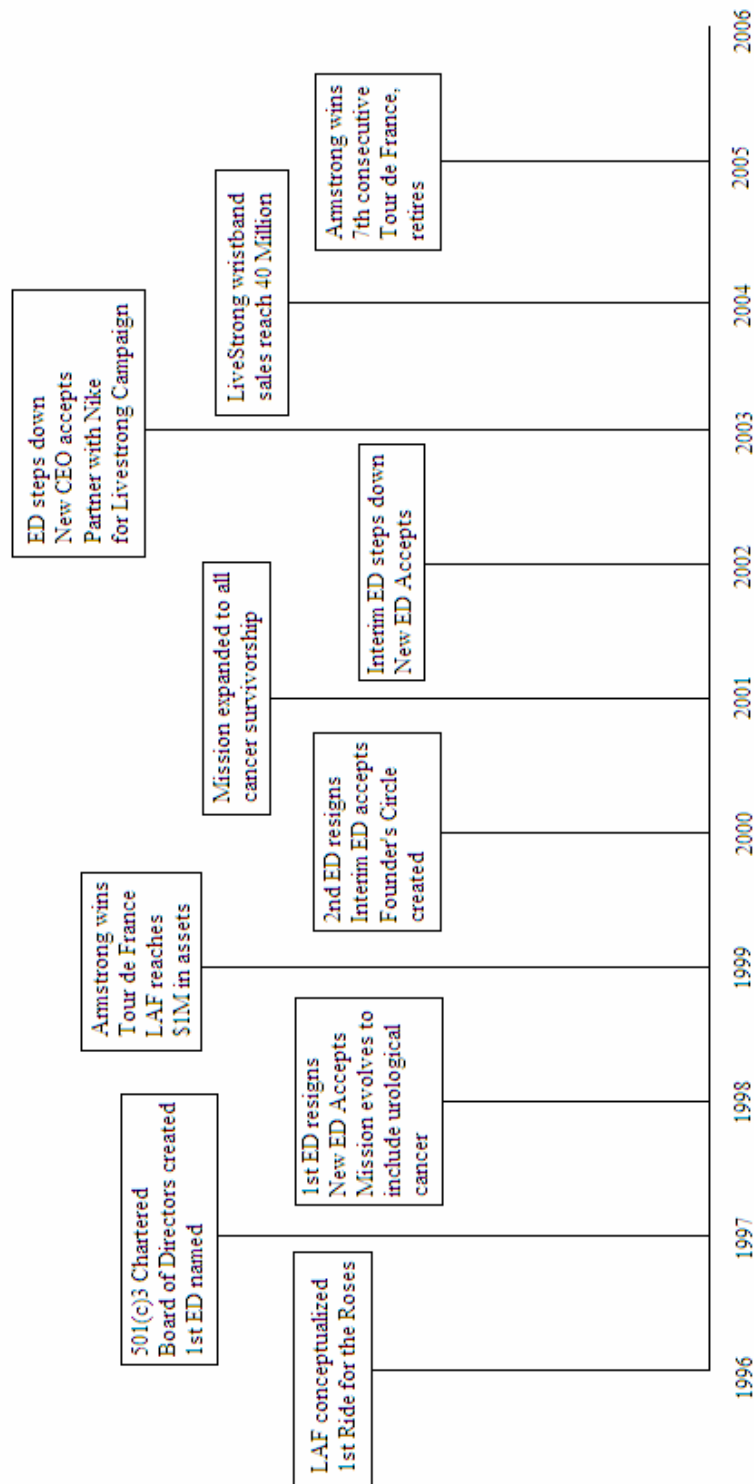


Figure 2: Timeline - History of the LAF

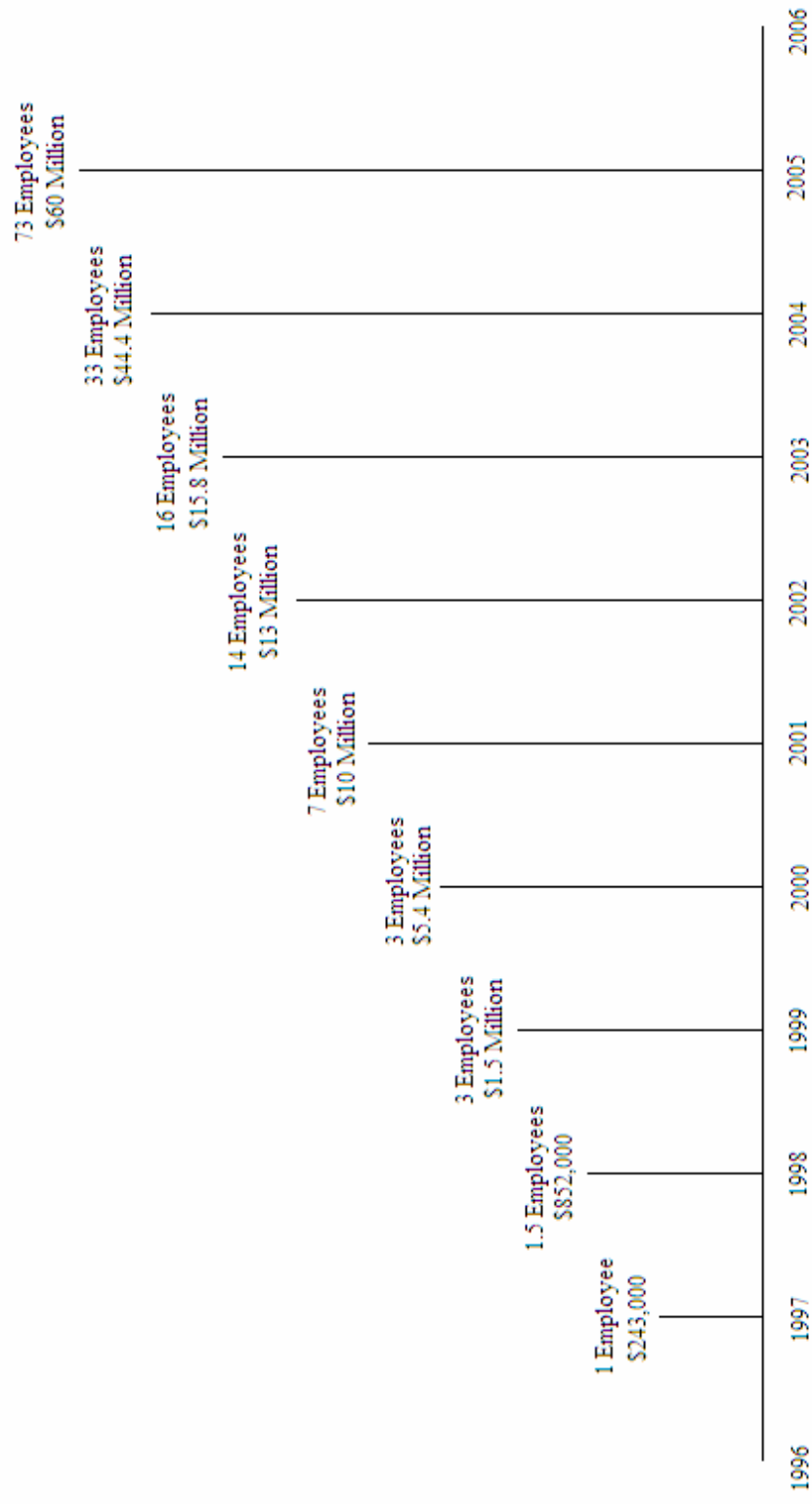


Figure 3: Timeline of Financial and Staff Growth
(Not drawn to scale)

Table 2: Interview Sample by Level in the Organization

C-Level:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive Officer • Chief Marketing Officer • Chief Mission Officer • Chief Operating Officer
Director Level:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Director of Finance • Director of Communications • Director of Innovations • Director of Technology • Director of Survivorship
Associate Director Level:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate Director of Advocacy • Associate Director of Events • Associate Director of Research Programs • Associate Director of Volunteer Services
Project Manager or Coordinator:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants Coordinator • Events Project Manager • Public Health Program Manager • Survivorship Project Manager • Web Content Manager
Volunteer Workers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairman of the Board of Directors • Volunteer Office Worker

CHAPTER THREE: Results

In answer to the research questions laid out in Chapter One, this chapter unveils the communicative challenges and changes experienced by an organization undergoing a period of growth. This study illuminates three major organizational changes that precede changes in communication and present several challenges for the organization: the emergence of a growing external constituency, the emergence of internal teams, and the emergence of a new leadership structure. At the LAF, each of these changes has preceded the next. Each change brings with it a challenge or set of challenges for the organization's members. Together, these changes impact the organization, its members and/or its stakeholders greatly. This section will explain these changes, the challenges that they present, and the impact they have on organizational communication at LAF.

CHANGE: GROWING CONSTITUENCY

Organizations often grow due to an increasing demand for their products or services (Starbuck, 1965). As an organization's constituency grows, more energy is directed towards communicating with constituents in an effective manner. Market segmentation begins to play a role as the organization strives to identify specific subgroups of clients and to make small product or service modifications in order to better serve them (Miller & Friesen, 1984). As LAF's main service is to provide information to different subgroups (cancer survivors, donors, grantees, volunteers, etc), members at LAF also noted an increased need for segmented communication with subgroups of clients.

The LAF has grown its database of supporters, consumers, and volunteers from scratch to over 2 million records in nine years. As more people become aware of the organization, the larger the need is for external communication explaining the organization's purpose, what it hopes to provide to constituents, and what it needs from its constituents. This has been a challenging area for LAF, specifically finding out who their constituents are and what information is valuable to them. LAF has encountered some specific challenges that highlight their struggle with external communications.

Challenge: Changing the Organization's Mission (6 *Instances*)

The mission of the LAF has changed four times since the inception of the organization. As stated previously, the mission originally focused on testicular cancer, but shortly moved to include a wider (and female-inclusive) audience by focusing on all urological cancer. By 1999, the mission scope continued to widen to include all cancer, with a focus on early detection and education. In 2000, the notion of survivorship came to the forefront, and the Foundation found its "sweet spot." The need for resources for people coping with cancer and families and friends of people coping with cancer was realized as huge. The advent of the LiveStrong brand and the immediate popularity of famous yellow wristband reinforced the notion of survivorship as a valid and needed mission by attracting hundreds of thousands of new constituents to LAF.

Internally, the survivorship mission is the life and breath of the organization. External audiences, however, seem to be confused by the change in mission statements and the organization's close association with the cycling community. One program manager noted that her research showed that 20% (a large proportion) of the people

contacting LAF for cancer resources are looking for information on testicular cancer, although the organization now offers a large amount of resources on virtually every type of cancer. Others noted that Armstrong's fame as a cyclist seems to cause some confusion as well. Because Armstrong is a cyclist, and all of the organization's main events have been cycling events thus far, LAF members have encountered members of the public who assume the organization is dedicated to cycling. While this notion is incorrect, LAF has benefited greatly from its association with Armstrong during his journey to fame. The Foundation has gained a higher profile in a shorter amount of time than would be likely if it wasn't associated with Armstrong.

Challenge: Segmented Communication (*13 Instances*)

Interestingly, confusion surrounding the mission of the Foundation has not stopped people from supporting the organization. Most understand that the organization is philanthropically involved in the cancer community, but some do not understand in what capacity. Organizational members admit they have not done a great job communicating with the public about where their funds are going. Several departments within LAF have recently unveiled plans to increase detailed communication with the public regarding their spending:

So many people identify us with Lance, the cyclist, or with the wristband, and they don't know any of the programs that we do. So I know as an organization, we are going to push our programs more and let people know, this is what we're doing. Yes, you've given us \$50-60 million for the wristbands, and this is what we're doing with that money. Providing research, advocacy, education.

Because LAF acts as a steward to publicly-raised funds for cancer research, some interviewees (n=4) state that they feel a responsibility to communicate with donors

specifically about where their funds are going. One of the organization's executive leaders expressed his disappointment with the lack of information the organization has provided these donors:

I just hate when somebody calls – like if a donor or supporter or somebody calls – and asks questions [about where their money is going] and I think to myself, they should know that – like, we should have told them that. You know, that should have been in the newsletter – that should have been – you know, it's just to me, obviously, our programs are so important that we should be telling everybody about them as opposed to, again, last year, every article – they just sold another five million wristbands. That's great, but that doesn't – that just tells people, "Oh, we have a lot of money," and it doesn't tell them where the money's going.

The push to provide information to LAF's constituents may be impacted by the Foundation's nonprofit status, but it also seems to stem from an inability to maintain personal relationships with all new donors. Early donors to LAF tended to be local to the Austin community and personally connected to the organization, either because they had been impacted by cancer or were friends of Armstrong or other board members. At first, larger donors maintained a high-touch relationship with the organization and were personally informed about where their funds were being applied. During pledge drives, Foundation members and volunteers personally called prospective donors and asked for gifts. Now donors give to the organization without being asked. The popularity of the wristband created a new type of donor for the LAF. These donors give smaller, unsolicited gifts, often through LAF's website (although they must contribute an additional gift on top of their wristband purchase to be considered a donor) and might live anywhere in the world. They are not personally connected to the organization and have no way to gain access to information about where their money is going, beyond

what LAF communicates to them through public media. Ensuring that these donors feel personally communicated with is a large challenge for LAF.

In addition to providing information to donors, almost half of the interviewees (n=9) explained that they feel an obligation to the cancer community to provide clear and concise information regarding programs that are available, advocacy initiatives, opportunities for research grants, and other resources available for people affected by cancer. LAF also supports a large volunteer base, which creates yet another segment of the constituent population to communicate with. Where online information may suffice to communicate with constituents researching cancer resources, volunteers require a more personal communication style. One member explains:

With volunteers, you do have to keep that personal touch, so definitely taking the time when they come in to chat about whatever's going on with them, so face-to-face communication as well. But for the most part, as far as LAF news or announcements and things like that, it kind of has to be done through email so you can assure that almost everyone will get it, and then follow it up with that face-to-face communication.

As each segment of LAF's constituency continues to grow, more effort is needed to communicate valid information for that segment, in the style that is appropriate for that audience.

Internally, keeping up with each segment of the constituency is a challenge. Most communication with external audiences is reactive to constituents contacting the Foundation, rather than proactive recruiting of new constituents. 35% of the members interviewed (n=7) stressed that they are continually "catching up" or "keeping up" with the growing needs of the constituency. The continual strain on internal resources to catch

up with the growth of LAF's constituency has led to much internal growth, a second change that has impacted the organization in a profound way.

CHANGE: EMERGENCE OF TEAMS

It has been documented that as more and more people are brought in to fulfill organizational goals, job functions become more focused (Greiner, 1972). Such is the case at the LAF. Half of the organizational members sampled (n=10) noted that their job functions had shifted from a varied set of responsibilities to a much more focused set of responsibilities. Employees who have been with the organization since the early days (more than 2 years tenure) especially noted this trend. They seem to appreciate this shift because it allows them to focus on perfecting their main task rather than attending to a variety of responsibilities. As one Associate Director explained:

It wasn't that long ago that there were three or four people working here and everybody kind of did everything. And I think the more you grow, the more specialized everybody's job gets, and, you know, as I said earlier, I was actually heading up several efforts until just recently and now my job has just continued to sort of get laser focused more and more on one specific thing, and I think that's what we've seen a lot of is we have more – you know, people are specialists at exactly what they do, and that's what they do.

As the organization has grown in revenue, staff, and popularity, more people are needed to take on the growing responsibilities of each department. Each department has grown from one person juggling many responsibilities to a team of several people with specialized job functions. As more people take on the responsibilities of each department, teams are built. Original members of the organization have come to manage the teams that have taken over the set of responsibilities that was once theirs:

My job description has become slightly more narrow although my title has always remained the same – but I think the responsibilities for me personally have changed. Now I manage a team that does the work that I used to do, and so now there are nine of us doing what I did five years ago on my own.

The change from individuals shouldering the responsibilities of entire departments to adding team members to share responsibilities creates several communicative challenges for organizational members.

Challenge: Information Sharing and Documentation (7 *Instances*)

As teams build, information must be shared; the information that was once the responsibility of one person now becomes the responsibility of many. The need for communication is central to the function of small groups and teams (Byers, 1997). Each team member has their focused function that coincides with the functions of the other team members to accomplish an organizational goal (i.e. raising money, creating programs, communicating with stakeholders, etc). As young organizations often lack formal processes for documenting information and job processes, communicating responsibilities and knowledge within teams becomes central to organizational learning (Starbuck, 1965).

The lack of a formal learning process creates a challenge for team members at LAF, as noted by one C-level member:

So... you have people who have been here a while who have a lot of knowledge in their head and nowhere else, and how do you share it and how do you bring on new people? It's definitely been challenging.

The challenge at LAF is in making sure all team members know and understand the goal of the team and how their function ties in with the others to accomplish this goal. To do

this, team members must document their processes and communicate with one another on a regular basis. This leads to team meetings. Every team or department at LAF meets on a regular basis, once or twice a week, to communicate about varying issues. As one director describes:

I have a weekly team meeting, and it's kind of three-fold. One is to cover any initiatives or issues that the team-members themselves might be having, individually or collectively. Secondly, to cover the elements covered in the Director Meetings. And then as an additional component to that, to rely on the team to put together messages and initiatives for me to take to other departments to suss them out on their behalf.

These team meetings are used for Directors to share information with their team, learn about the concerns of their team members, and help provide an avenue for learning about the organization.

The prominent sentiment among all interviewees was that communication within teams at LAF is a priority. Each team member felt that they have a good grasp of the goings on of their team and its members and felt that they knew where they were in relation to their departmental goals:

And I think in the programs side, because we're so connected to the mission, we know where we're headed, we know what goals we're trying to achieve. And our leadership is, when they're here, when they're in the office, are very communicative... we have a sense of community in Programs because we're all here and we all work on the same things.

Most teams seem to function well and amiably. The teams that emerged earliest are perceived by other members to be the most functional. This was attributed to having set processes in place, relationships established, and to team directors making communication a priority. The challenge of adding team members to take over the work

of the one-person department seems to be addressed with time and communication. As teams build, more resources are available to provide avenues of organizational learning.

Challenge: Proximity (*16 Instances*)

Another challenge noted by a majority of interviewees (n=16) as being problematic to communication in the organization was that of physical proximity. Over its nine years of existence, LAF has outgrown its office space three times. The organization began in a small one-bedroom house-turned-office, then moved to a larger house, and finally moved again to an office building. In the past year, the organization outgrew the new office space and expanded into three separate offices on the same floor. Where once organizational members could easily overhear everything in the office, now they must make an effort to find out what's happening in different areas of the organization.

When I first started, we were all in the same suite, and it was a lot easier to collectively work on things. You just had proximity; you were closer to each other. We could hear what each other was working on, so we could collaborate. Now that we're a little further apart... it's definitely had an impact with Programs being over here and different departments being in different areas.

While adding members to an organization is known to make communication more complex (Byers, 1997), adding physical distance between members creates even more challenges for organizational members and reduces the quality of communication within the organization (Miles, 1980; Zaremba, 2003).

The result of a company-wide survey taken in the summer of 2005 alerted LAF leaders that communication remains “silo-ed” within each departmental space in the organization. That is, while a lot of communication occurs within each team, information

is not often shared between teams. This behavior has been documented in the organizational systems theory literature as detrimental to the organization; each department must be aware of what is occurring in other departments in order to effectively accomplish the mission of the organization (Almaney, 1974; Byers, 1997). At LAF, this has reportedly resulted in misinformation being shared with stakeholders (n=2) and lack of collaboration between departments (n=2).

Where once proximity created the context for hearing information about other members' work, now there is a barrier to gaining organizational information. One Director explained:

Even though we're on the same floor, we're not in contiguous space. There are walls, those walls create barriers. This past year we've had to grow to 3 different suites - 2 new ones - and that in itself, just that physical relocation, was a difficult change for some people. Let alone the communications side of that, so someone says that "I really can't communicate with Jane now." Well, you really can, but either you and/or Jane are going to have to leave your physical premises.

Other organizational members noted the communication that once led to organizational learning and collaboration is stymied because of the distance. One member remarked:

When I first started, and I was down there [in the only office], you saw everybody; development was two cubes over from me. So we were all very close. And now... I can walk down to that suite, which is where all of our mailboxes are so we're encouraged to keep going and interacting, but I wouldn't even know what to talk to them about if I went over there. I may know them on a friendly basis and know what's going on in their personal lives, but at a work level, I don't. I may know who's pregnant and when they're due, but other than that we don't have anything to talk about because we have no frame of reference.

The leadership of LAF recognizes that lower-level members are frustrated with the lack of communication between departments, but have yet to resolve the issue. Plans are in play to leverage various information and communication technologies to provide new channels of communication between teams.

Challenge: Information and Communication Technologies (15 *Instances*)

In addition to expanding office space, the growth of the organization has created a need for several members of the organization to travel to different areas of the country for a variety of reasons (fundraising events, donor meetings, programmatic events, etc.). Whether organization members are down the hall from each other or across the country, this diffusion of locality has created a trend: people tend to rely on information and communication technologies (ICTs) like cell phones, telephones, wireless handheld devices, e-mail, and instant messenger programs to communicate with others in and out of the office.

E-mail was named by as the channel that members rely on most for internal communication (n=15). The tool works well for conveying task-related messages; however, it was noted by many to create a challenge for the growing organization. One Director explains:

You've got to not rely on e-mail, which technology, it's a great tool to effectively move business along, but it has created an impersonal barrier, society-wide. When you have this much fast change, it can play a significant element in being impersonal within the organization, messages being misinterpreted, rather than this one-on-one dialogue.

While technology allows members to overcome the communicative hurdle of distance, it does not allow the level of richness organizational members may be used to in daily face-to-face communications (Rice & Gattiker, 2001). LAF's leaders have laid plans to leverage the organization's intranet site to provide departmental information and news for all members to read; these plans may be effective for members who want access to

information, but will also create a new communicative culture to which members must adapt.

Challenge: Effort (19 *Instances*)

Even with technology, growth presents one further challenge for internal communication: information that was once passively absorbed by members due to proximity must be sought out by organizational members through proactive communication. Interviewees noted that communicating in close proximity was “easy” (n=3) or has become “hard” (n=10), “difficult” (n=4), or “challenging” (n=5) as the organization has grown. This added effort to communicate may be the biggest change experienced by organizational members throughout the growth process. As one Associate Director explained:

I think that’s probably *the* biggest challenge... just communication amongst the staff members. I think because at the beginning, it was very easy to pass along a communication because you’re in an office with several people and it was cross-departmental, so I worked very closely with [other departments] and I just kind of heard what was going on. It was very easy; you didn’t really have to make an effort to go out and say, “OK, here’s what just happened in the staff meeting,” because everybody was there and everyone had a chance to talk because there were seven of you. So with such a big change in numbers, that just can’t happen. There’s no way that everyone can be listening and kind of hear what’s going on at the same time. So inevitably it starts out with, you just feel like you don’t know what’s going on, like “I didn’t hear about that event and I should have been told”... Then there’s that, that you have to deal with in the sense of, I like to be told in an email, and other people like to have meetings every Monday and be told like that. So those challenges come on board too.

This quote highlights the complexity that organizational growth has brought to communication at LAF. Members who were used to having information handed to them or overhearing it now have to actively engage with others through another

communication channel and ask what's going on in other departments. Team members must find ways to communicate their own initiatives to other departments. Another interviewee explained:

You know, people aren't always thinking "I need to tell everybody what I'm doing," and you know, then all of a sudden you have this organization that's grown so much and with all these people, and the communication is so different, and you really have to work hard to make sure you're interacting with everybody across the board and finding a way [to obtain information].

With no formal channels in place to promote interdepartmental communication, members are frustrated with not having been personally communicated with and are at a loss for how to improve communications. Organizational leaders are also frustrated with this situation; they feel that the information is "out there," but that some members aren't exerting enough effort to get to it. The leaders used to hold monthly staff meetings to personally convey information to members; the organization's membership has now outgrown any space available for monthly staff meetings, so staff meetings are reserved for special occasions (retreats, holiday parties, etc), roughly three times per year. With the implementation of the intranet, leaders hope some of the frustration will be alleviated.

One C-level member expressed surprise at the level of emotionality displayed in this frustration, and attributes it to members' personal attachment to the mission of the organization:

There's a lot more feeling and emotion in things here than I have probably seen in my career. So sometimes unless someone's told something personally, they don't believe that it's communicated. I found that to be an interesting behavior that I had not encountered before.

All interviewees noted that they either came to the Foundation because they were personally invested in the organization's mission (n=15) or have grown strongly attached to the mission through their work (n=5). Because of this personal and emotional involvement, it was noted that there is an emotional aspect of this environment that had not been experienced by members who came from a for-profit environment. Holding such a personal stake in the organization may prompt members to want more personal communication, which creates another challenge for the organization.

With the emergence of teams, the LAF has seen a number of challenges that create positive and negative impacts. The organization continues to struggle to create valid and useful channels for communication between teams and to keep members informed of happenings throughout the organization. Technology is most often leveraged to replace the informal communication that occurred when the organization was smaller, but members still crave personal interaction between teams.

CHANGE: NEW LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

While LAF has seen very little employee turnover in its nine years, it has seen a disproportionate amount of turnover in its top-level of leadership. It's true that many organizations shift away from the creative, entrepreneurial executives that lead in the early stage of the organization, and towards leaders with strong managerial skills as the organization begins to mature. Greiner (1972) calls this the "leadership crisis," and notes that it is common among growing organizations. In nine years, LAF has seen more leaders than most organizations in such a short time; five different leaders have graced its top executive office since inception.

Members speculate that the turnover has occurred because the mission of the organization has changed several times, because leaders weren't equipped to manage the organization as it grew, and because the Board of Directors may have been too heavily involved in running the organization until recently. One board member even stepped into the Executive Director role for 2 years on a volunteer basis. The Chairman of the Board explains:

In past years we were at times very involved because it was a small organization and at times with no – really no leadership that had the kind of experience that you need in order to grow and manage a rapidly expanding organization. We had a time when the Chairman of the Board was actually also the Executive Director of the organization, so we had a volunteer who was actually kind of leading the management of the organization, and that was just – again, that was in the early period.

The board has since hired a new President and CEO for the Foundation and has worked with him to employ a team of experienced leaders to manage the growth of the organization. The Foundation's managers and its Board continually negotiate to get the Board into the appropriate level of involvement and have the Foundation's staff provide the appropriate amount of communication so that the Board is comfortable setting goals for the future of the organization. The Chairman of the Board admits that it's time for the Board to step back and "uncurl their fingers" from around the Foundation, as long as communication between the Board and the Foundation's staff is effective:

Communication becomes a critical component because you have to have the staff communicating to the board the information that the board needs to exercise its oversight and to feel good that the organization is doing what it needs to do. So that communication piece is just incredibly important. If that communication doesn't exist, then you have the board wanting to get back involved because they've got an obligation to make sure that everything is going okay.

The new level of leadership has been added to the organization in order to better manage the growing number of employees, teams, and initiatives. Executive leaders seem to have struck an accord with the Board in terms of communication.

Within the Foundation itself, new levels of management have also emerged. As teams have grown, Associate Directors and Directors have been named to manage those teams, and hierarchy has begun to build in the organization. The building of management hierarchies during times of growth is well-documented among organizational growth literature (Greiner, 1972). As hierarchies build, communication changes from informally sharing information among all employees to a more formal, top-down model:

Board > Leaders > Directors > Associate Directors > Team Members

This change has created several new challenges for organizational members as well.

Challenge: Hierarchical Communication Channels (7 *Instances*)

As more and more members are added to an organization, the initial model of informal communication at LAF has become obsolete. Organizational members expressed that the sheer amount of information and increase in space has made passively “hearing” everything impossible and unmanageable. Members resort to seeking out information relevant to their job function. This information is generally provided within each department by the Director.

The process of sharing information about the organization and gleaning information about departmental initiatives is currently in flux. Until recently, Directors were invited to a weekly “Directors’ Meeting” with the organization’s leaders (CEO, COO, Chief Marketing Officer and Chief Mission Officer) to gain information about the

organization's initiatives and to communicate what was happening within each department. It became clear that more people were needed in these meetings to share information with greater effectiveness. Now the meeting is called the "Leadership Team Meeting" and also includes Associate Directors. A C-level member explains:

Well, one of the things that we did is we had a weekly directors' meeting, and there were people in the directors' meeting who were not directors – like our CEO. So, the first thing I did was change the name of that and we call it Leadership Team, and I expanded the number of people who were in there. So, currently we have directors and associate directors. So, we've broadened that, and that almost doubled – more than doubled the number of people who were in the room. So we had more exposure to whatever program activity is going on in the foundation.

During these meetings, Directors and Associate Directors are tasked with informing the organization's leaders about happenings within their departments. They are also expected to communicate with their teams about information heard in these meetings, such as other teams' initiatives or directives from organizational leaders.

This model of top-down communication may sound appropriate in theory, but lower-level members claim it does not always work. This model relies on C-level leaders to share an abundance of information and determines what should be shared, and relies on each Director or Associate Director to have the communication and management skills to inform team members of the appropriate amount of information without over-communicating. Some information inevitably does not make it down the chain; this results in some employees feeling left "out of the loop:"

I think I have to work pretty hard to get [communicated with about happenings in the organization]... it's an adjustment for me not to feel like I always have the pulse of what's going on. And sometimes I feel that we get things second-hand. Some huge sweeping initiatives that will affect everything, we'll kind of hear about them as an aside and I think that's hard to maneuver and it's not a very motivating factor.

Leaders at the LAF acknowledge that the current top-down model is not always effective. When asked whether he believes there to be a disconnect between leaders and lower-level workers, one C-level leader explained:

I think that there is. Well, I think it was evident – last year we did the strategic plan, and I think during that process it became evident that in talking to individuals in different departments, you know, some knew what's going on and some didn't, and so I think any time you rely on kind of trickle-down, sometimes it doesn't get there.

Relying on Directors to convey messages to teams has proven to be problematic. Many Directors were not originally hired in a managerial capacity, but were promoted as more and more people joined the organization because they knew the most about that department. As organizations become larger and more formal, this practice of promoting members of the organization who were active and loyal during the early stages of the organization is a common phenomenon (Starbuck, 1965).

Meetings of the Leadership Team reportedly leave lower-level employees feeling alienated and craving personal communication regarding the happenings and direction of the organization. In order to overcome feelings of alienation, organizational leaders have tasked Directors and Associate Directors with communicating with their team members more often via face-to-face communication. One Director explained:

When you have this much fast change, technology can play a significant element in being impersonal within the organization, messages being misinterpreted, rather than this one-on-one dialogue. And we recognize that as an organization and are trying to do something about what I call “WAM” management – Walk Around Manager. You have to be WAM in a growth organization or it just escapes you.

More responsibility is being delegated to Directors and Associate Directors to provide the level of personal interaction and organizational information that their team members are asking for. The adjustment from hearing information straight from organizational leaders to hearing it from members' direct supervisors also contributes to members feeling "silo-ed" within their departments.

IMPACT ON THE ORGANIZATION

The changes and challenges presented by members at LAF in regards to their experiences of organizational growth and communication point to three larger impacts on the organization. These impacts were sometimes directly referenced by participants, but are also indicative of what the changes and challenges mean for the organization in general, as it continues to grow and function.

Impact: Renewed Emphasis on Internal Communication (9 instances)

LAF's leaders acknowledge the communication "gap" in their organization; however, most forums for more personal interaction have disappeared as people scramble to catch up with the vast amount of growth they've experienced. Several interviewees (n=6) expressed their disappointment about not having more personal interaction, such as the monthly staff meetings or internal newsletters that they had been used to. Members who have been with the organization for two years or longer have experienced the biggest change in the way the organization is structured and the amount of information lower-level members are privy to. Such complaints have led leaders to set internal communication as a high priority matter.

In order to address the lack of communication to lower-level employees, the Leadership Team is planning to utilize information and communication technologies to fill in the gaps. They hope to use an intranet to post internal information and other media, like Blogs of different leaders' weekly experiences. The hope in introducing these channels is to give more people access to first-hand information about what's happening at other levels and in other departments of the organization. Employees seem disappointed thus far with the level of information they've received through the technology, but are hopeful that it will eventually grant them access to more internal information:

They've also created an intranet, so that's more of our internal outlet, and there is information on there. I don't think it's helpful, not yet. I think it has potential to be helpful, but some of the information is completely outdated about the programs and matters today that aren't close to being current.

As previously stated, ICTs do help bridge the distance between organizational members and departments; however, these new channels of communication may not provide communication as rich as the informal face-to-face interactions some members were used to. The adjustment from informal communication to formal, regulated, technology-mediated communication is changing the culture of the organization as well.

External communication has been highlighted as a priority as well. LAF has purchased an online constituent management solution to help track constituents who are engaging with the organization online. The system also allows the organization to segment their constituency based on the actions constituents have taken in the past (volunteering, donating, looking for cancer resources), and use that information to

communicate with each segment via mass e-mail. LAF members hope that these tools will allow more effective communication with external audiences.

Another piece of reviving internal communications was noted by a few members: communication is intended to flow from the top-down, but does not often flow from the bottom-up.

Sure we get a lot of information that'll be coming down from a high level when they feel it's appropriate for us to know, but there's not a lot of us going back up with our communication, and so I know that it came out loud and clear during the retreat and follow up evaluation after the retreat, but there was never any response to that.

While team meetings are in place so that lower-level members can share their concerns with leadership, leaders realize this is not comparable to personal communication with lower-level employees. Leaders have realized the need for a channel of communication from the lower-levels up. To address this need, a Chief Operating Officer was recently hired to for internal management of the organization and to put processes in place for assessment. One leader explains:

What lacked a little bit was having someone here on the ground every single day – a "go-to" person – and we have that now, and I think that's been really – we've been very blessed to get somebody with the capabilities of [the COO].

With the new COO in the office to engage with organizational members and the use of ICTs to provide information, leaders hope members will be able to adapt to the new structure of the organization and its communication process.

While members admit that the new leadership structure is indicative of leaders trying to respond to their needs, it still relies on the member to exert the effort to communicate. C-level leaders advertise an “open-door” policy for employees; however,

finding time in the leaders' schedules, or indeed even finding the leader him- or herself is often difficult, and deters some members from engaging with organizational leaders. One interviewee remarked:

I know that they've all promoted an open-door policy, but that's only effective when they're here. If I had a question and wanted to find [the CEO], I really have no idea when or where he's going to be, and what's the best way to reach him. And, as a person, I think he's great, but as an attainable outlet, he's not. As an alternative, [the COO] would be the one to go to, but again she travels so much, and when she's here, her schedule is booked. But I know they all uphold an open-door policy, but the logistics don't really allow them to do it.

Yet other members find C-level leaders accessible and helpful:

If I had a concern – I mean, I don't know if you've had a chance to talk with [the CEO] yet, but I mean, he's so wonderful and really has an open-door policy and is very accessible. I would just go to him and know that he would do what needed to be done.

The dichotomy between members who feel comfortable communicating directly with organizational leaders and those who don't implies that members must be willing to initiate communication with members at higher levels.

Impact: Evolution of Culture (8 instances)

Such changes have created a new culture in the organization, and forced members to adapt to new communication styles. This change has been a tough adjustment for several organizational members:

In addition, just challenges with such a growing staff; so many people, so much change in structure and the *feel* of the organization, I mean even the change from the house was a huge just structural change. I mean we're in cubes now; it's very different than being in a little house where you could just open the windows; it was just much, much more casual and familial.

As organizations move from small familial structures to larger, more bureaucratic structures, organizational culture and communication become more formal (Greiner, 1972). As noted by Miles & Randolph (1980), “This transition (growth from infancy to maturity) may be problematic for both the innovative organization's leadership and the membership, both originally having been attracted to the new setting presumably because of its congruence with their styles and orientations.” Organizational members may feel conflicted or alienated as the culture of the organization evolves.

Members who are unhappy with the new culture at LAF and are resistant to the new management structure are not expected to stay with the organization for very long. The growth of the organization seems to be reaching a point where those who cannot or will not adapt to new management and communication styles may be asked to leave. One Director remarked:

There has been a sort of new guard put in place. The small, family group that had existed in the organization is especially still there, but then we put a – I would say a weak task force has come in – I'm part of that, I would say – that would change the organization greatly, to use best practices and put things in. The original team I would say is – that has baggage, if you will, is still here. And so, as soon as some of that – those people that are not performing at the higher level start being asked to leave, that they will have a very negative impact. There's only been one of those people asked to leave so far and there will probably be a couple more this year – this quarter probably – and then, at that point, it will have a very negative impact on the morale, but I think the people that truly understand growth and the life cycle of organizations can appreciate that because we're putting in more systems, we're putting in more control, we are – we're sort of growing up, and that's sometimes painful.

As the culture of the organization becomes more formal, members are expected to keep up and move forward with the organization. This entails adapting to new means of communication and perhaps not being privy to the level of information that was once available to all organizational members. While all members interviewed (n=20) admitted

that adjusting to new styles and channels of communication has been challenging, most members felt this was a positive change for the organization, creating stability and much-needed processes (n=18). As noted in the organizational growth literature, prospective members are attracted to working for organizations depending on the stage of the lifecycle the organization is in. In the beginning, members are often drawn by the purpose of the organization, while later members are drawn by the social structure and stability (Starbuck, 1965). This seems to be a point of change for LAF.

Growth has changed the LAF from a small, familial organization to a formal, structured organization with new constituents, new levels of hierarchy and a new management structure. The sense of community that was once felt by the entire organization has become fragmented into teams. As teams and departments grow, the culture and feel of the organization has changed; the familiarity of the original core has been diluted as more and more unfamiliar faces are brought on board. Original members have been made directors over their department, new leadership has been brought in, and the structure of the organization has changed. The informal style of communication that was once dominant in the organization is no longer feasible, and communication has become challenging for all organizational members.

Impact: Rapid Growth equals Rapid Adaptation (14 instances)

One final nuance of the change in communications at LAF relates to the rapid nature of the growth the organization has experienced. While some members had experienced growth in other organizations, they often remarked on the unique nature of the growth at LAF because it happened so quickly:

The bulk of the growth of this organization has been literally since about 4th quarter of '03, was when the idea, the concepts, the birthing really started at the organization. My perception of this organization, and what I've seen over 30 years of business and start ups, is that it has been very unique. Not so much just unique to nonprofit growth, but in for-profit. The LiveStrong brand has led to a heightened awareness of this mission, overnight, internationally.

The level of demand LAF has experienced led to an immediate need for staffing - bodies to answer phones, respond to requests, even receive donations and welcome volunteers. Members are so inundated with simply "catching up" that they have not had time to adapt or even register what's happening within the organization:

There is a lack of communication just because things are moving so fast and furious... Sometimes things just move so fast that it's hard to kind of get the overall picture on a daily basis and what everyone is doing. But I know that they're putting in steps to utilize our intranet to really see more of a focus on what every department is doing. So, in the last year or so, just with the wristbands and everything going crazy, we kind of had put that on the back burner, but now, I think, we all realize we have to get back into 'everybody needs to know what everyone else is doing.'

The rapid rate of growth has demanded immediate immersion in a job function and in the organization for members joining at the height of growth. Those who have been with the organization since earlier days have taken on extra responsibility and have had to work at full capacity in order to meet demand. Process and structure have understandably been secondary to keeping the organization running. As the rate of growth begins to slow, members have begun to recognize the need for internal communications and processes. The evolution of organizational processes and culture has been so accelerated that members have not had time to fully adapt.

The next chapter will discuss these findings, what they mean for the LAF, and what they tell organizational scholars about the place of communication in discussing organizational growth.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the results of the study and extrapolates meaning from the data to answer the Research Questions set forth in Chapter 1. A discussion of the implications of these answers will follow. The data is also used to confirm or disconfirm claims made by previous scholars on organizational growth as to how communication fits in to the organizational growth paradigm. The case of the LAF is used as a sensitizing device to speculate about organizational growth experiences in other settings. This chapter also notes the limitations of the study and highlights areas for future research regarding organizational growth and communication.

COMMUNICATION AND GROWTH AT THE LAF

Research Question One

The following research question was presented in chapter one:

RQ1: What are the main communicative challenges that this organization has encountered relating to its recent growth? What has caused these challenges?

In answer to this question, the communicative challenges and causes encountered by LAF were outlined in detail in Chapter 3. To recap, three changes to the organization preceded communicative challenges: the growth of the external constituency, the development of internal teams, and the creation of a new leadership structure. Following these changes, members encountered a number of challenges with regards to organizational communication: communicating with the public about changes to the organization's mission, segmenting messages for specific audiences, creating new avenues for organizational learning, expanding physical work space, overcoming silo-ed

communication, using ICTs to overcome communication gaps, expending increased effort to access information, and introducing new channels for internal and external communication. These challenges were presented by members of the organization who had experienced them first-hand.

Research Question Two

A second research question was presented in Chapter One:

RQ2: How has communication changed in the organization as it has grown? How have these changes impacted the organization?

In order to answer this question, one can map the changes in communication as an organization grows. Figure 4.1 shows the early communication structure at LAF. Communication flowed between the Board and the C-Level Leader, then between the Leader and each Team. Figure 4.2 shows the current communication structure.

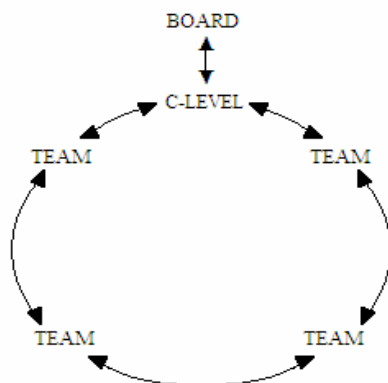


Figure 4.1: Early Structure

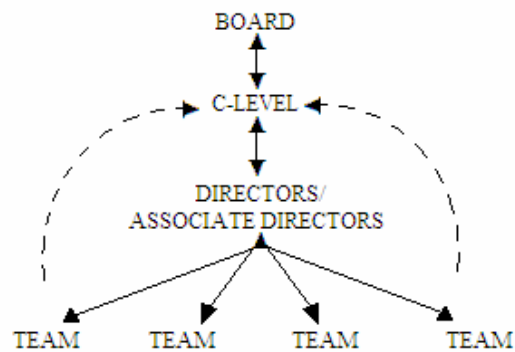


Figure 4.2: Current Structure

Communication flows between the Board and C-level Leaders, then between C-Level Leaders and Directors/Associate Directors, then between Directors/Associate Directors and their Team members. Information may also flow back up from Team members to C-

Level leaders through “open-door” communication, although there is no formal procedure in place for this communication. These figures illustrate the shift towards a more formal and hierarchical communication structure as the organization has grown.

Organizational Culture

Internally, these changes have resulted in a large change to the culture of the organization. Organizational culture is created by the communication that occurs within an organization, and consists of “patterns of human action and recursive behaviors (including talk and its symbolic residues) and meaning” (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). For LAF, communication styles, structures, and interaction patterns have changed drastically from the early days of the organization. Thus, the culture of the organization is drastically changed as well. The introduction of new leadership and new channels of communication make the organization look and feel very different from what it once was. Many of these changes evolved naturally with the growth of the organization, such as proximity; others, such as the structuring of the organization, are the result of conscious decisions made by the organization’s Board and Leaders. The power to impact organizational culture unilaterally emphasizes the empowered role of organizational leaders in the new model of communication.

Role of Leadership

The role of LAF’s Leaders has shifted during the growth period from one of entrepreneurship to one of management and accountability. While entrepreneurial Leaders were appropriate to drive the mission of the organization and create a market in

which to promote the mission in the early days, management Leaders are needed in growing organizations to organize and measure the efforts of the organization to ensure that it can begin to fulfill its mission (Greiner, 1972). At LAF, members seemingly accept the new culture of management and accountability with the hope that they can be more effective in fulfilling the mission of the organization. The push now for Leaders to promote the mission of the Foundation as well as focus on accountability and measurement bodes well for developing a positive culture for the organization.

Inherent to the new Leadership and management structure is the need to facilitate and control information within the organization (Zaremba, 2003). In the new model of communication, it is clear that Leaders now hold more control over information being dispersed to other organizational members than in the original model. Leaders decide what information should be shared with other organizational members, which members to share it with, and in what format it should be shared. By controlling the flow of communication, Leaders control the culture of the organization as well. This level of control illustrates how the new structure of the organization affords more power to organizational leaders than other organizational members.

According to Clegg (1989), organizations set up structures of power and points of passage in order to lead to the “stabilization and fixing of rules of meaning and membership, and techniques of production and discipline” (p. 241). This statement describes the reasoning put forth by leaders at LAF for the new structure and formalization taking place. In controlling the information available to members, leaders help shape the work experience of organizational members. As members’ job functions become narrower in definition and scope, they no longer need access to the amount of

information they once needed to complete their jobs. Therefore, less information is being communicated. All the while, organizational members can focus on their specific function and increase the quality of their work and perhaps the productivity of the organization.

Turnover

As LAF begins to grow into its new culture, members must either adapt to or resist these changes. Those members open to adapting to the new culture may enjoy the benefits of showing their loyalty to the organization, such as promotion. In return, they give up access to information that was once readily shared throughout the organization. They are held to a higher standard of accountability for their work. Communicating with leaders and other departments becomes challenging. But their jobs are stable, their teams are amiable, and they are making more progress towards achieving the mission of the organization.

On the other hand, resistance to the change in culture may result in employee turnover. As the organization continues to grow and the culture continues to change, members who enjoyed the early informal culture of the organization may not enjoy the new, more structured culture. Such members could respond poorly and choose to leave or be asked to leave. This should result in bringing in new organizational members that are open to the organization's culture, and will continue to reinforce and validate the new culture of the organization.

External Perception

Creating a culture that values accountability and management also sends external audiences the message that the organization strives to be effective and efficient. Rather than focusing on the amount of money raised, LAF's external communications moving forward are emphasizing how that money is being put to use. As a nonprofit operating foundation, the LAF must rely on different types of measures than for-profit organizations in order to convey that it is a good steward to the funds received (Sawhill & Williamson, 2001). Communicating organizational goals and achievements to segmented populations of constituents is a new practice for the LAF that members hope will foster a sense of trust in their constituency.

Future Direction of the LAF: A New Model of Communication

Overall, the communicative changes brought on by organizational growth at LAF have changed the work experience for members. Members at every level experience the "growing pains" of the organization as it struggles to achieve a stable structure and allow the supply to catch up with the demand of the external environment. It remains to be seen whether Leaders' renewed emphasis on internal communications will improve the work-experience and satisfaction of lower-level members, or whether ICTs will provide channels rich enough to share information between departments successfully. In order for LAF to maintain its success, teams must be able to effectively communicate with one another (Byers, 1997). Additionally, in order to keep lower-level members motivated, they should feel that their personal needs within the organization are heard by leaders and

are being met (Zaremba, 2003). Therefore, ideally LAF should continue to develop its model of communication to include these communication channels, as in Figure 4.3.

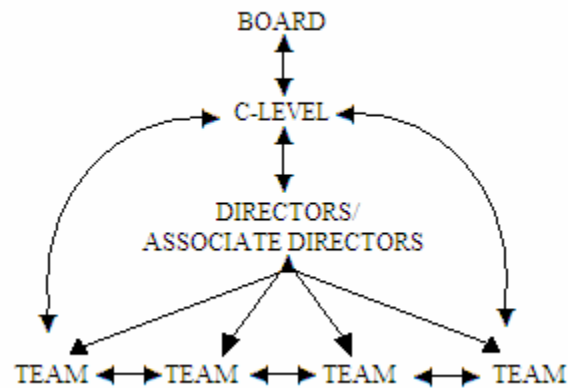


Figure 4.3: Ideal Communication Structure

This model allows for communication to flow vertically from the top-down and from the bottom-up, as well as horizontally across the organization. This model is descriptive of what organizational members are striving for and asking for; perhaps as the organization continues to grow and develop, LAF's communicative model will continue to develop as well.

APPLICATION OF FINDINGS TO PREVIOUS THEORY

These findings confirmed previous theories of other organizational scholars; they also highlight the role of communication in these theories. For example, Greiner (1972) noted that members' jobs become more specialized organizations grow. This was found to be true at LAF. Members' jobs become focused on one specific task as more people are brought on to each team. This specialization necessitates clear communication so

that each member is aware of how their specific job function fits in with team members' jobs, and how their function helps the organization to achieve its goals.

Several scholars have noted the formalization that takes place as hierarchies build in growing organizations (Starbuck, 1965; Greiner, 1972; Kimberly, 1980; Miller & Friesen, 1984). The formalization of structure and process was certainly confirmed at LAF. Notably, communication has also become more formal as the organization has grown. Specific channels of communication have been established, and there is a protocol for gaining and sharing information within the organization. Employees at every level are expected to go through their immediate supervisors; communication is distributed from the top-down and may travel from the bottom up as well. As noted by Greiner (1972) and Miller & Friesen (1984), authority in growing organizations is delegated to middle managers (or in the case of LAF, Directors and Associate Directors), creating a hierarchical flow of communication. This process presents a very different model from the informal communication model LAF followed in its early days (See figures 4.1 and 4.2).

Another theory set forth by Miles (1980) is that physical and psychological distance can divide organizations into subdivisions. This was duly noted by members at LAF, who also said this subdivision caused the greatest communicative strain on teams. One of the biggest struggles for LAF at this point is creating an avenue for information sharing between teams in order to facilitate collaboration and clarity. Only time will tell whether technological solutions provide rich enough communication between teams to overcome this hurdle.

Externally, Bedian (1986) observed that constituencies change with the changing goals of the organization. At LAF, the original constituency consisted mainly of members of the cycling community and those affected by testicular cancer. As the mission of the organization has shifted to a more general focus (cancer survivorship), the original constituency is still there but is a drop in the sea of a wide-ranging constituency. Several members also noted that with Armstrong retiring from his cycling career, the organization is beginning to move away from its close association with the cycling community. LAF has even changed its logo to remove the bicycle that was once incorporated. This action emphasizes LAF's strategy to serve and appeal to a wider audience. Similarly, scholars have documented that as a constituency grows, organizations tend to segment their markets and constituencies (Miller & Frieses, 1984). LAF has also begun segmenting their constituent groups. The reasoning behind this segmentation is that the organization wants to be able to communicate with its external constituent base more effectively and efficiently, to give each constituent information relevant to his or her needs. This emphasis on communication with external audiences has not been emphasized in previous literature.

Finally, one previous theory that could not be fully tested in this case was Starbuck's (1965) postulation that motivations for joining an organization may shift from goal orientation to social structure orientation as an organization grows. All members interviewed had been with the organization for at least six months, so it's impossible to say why the newest members have joined the LAF. I argue, however, that due to the overwhelming majority's strong identification with the mission of the Foundation, mission may have a stronger pull in certain organizations than social structure, even over

time and with large amounts of growth. Even those participants who joined the organization only six months ago noted mission as the main determinant of their joining the organization. Further examination of the motivations of new members joining the organizations is needed to fully understand this issue.

Clearly, organizational scholars have highlighted important trends in growing organizations, and this case has bolstered those claims. This case also highlighted the importance of communication to those claims. Without examining the role of communication, studies on organizational growth are incomplete. Noting trends without examining the root cause of such trends does not tell us enough about the experience of organizations as they move through the growth process. We must continue to examine the experiences of organizations to fully understand why organizations react as they do to the growth phase of the organizational life cycle.

APPLICATION OF FINDINGS TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

The results of this study have confirmed previous theories laid forth by organizational scholars and have explained how communication fits into theories regarding organizational growth. The ways in which LAF was impacted by organizational growth, however, also creates new theories of organizational growth and communication. These theories have grown out of the impacts experienced by LAF in response to the growth of the organization and the communicative changes it has experienced.

First, growth at the LAF led to a renewed emphasis on communication in the organization. As the organization grew, leaders realized that to succeed in fulfilling the organization's mission, communication must be clear and effective. Members demand

more avenues of communication and must work harder to access information. I argue that clear and effective communication is essential for any organization to survive such a period of growth, and that leaders will inevitably have to make communication a known priority throughout the organization. All growing organizations will change their communicative structure and process as more people are added; to recognize the need for communication at all levels is natural.

Second, the culture at LAF has changed radically since the early days of the Foundation. While such changes have been documented, they have generally been attributed to change in leadership, processes, and structure. I argue that the main agent of change in organizational culture is communication. As an organization's processes change, communication changes. As an organization's leadership changes, communication changes. As an organization's structure changes, communication changes. Communication is the main element of organizational culture, and without emphasis on communication, members may find that they have a hard time adapting to the new culture.

Third, the case of the LAF is unique in that the organization experienced an extremely rapid rate of growth. While scholars have documented several ways in which growth impacts organizations, few, if any, studies on the rate of growth and organizational impact exist. I hypothesize that organizations will respond to growth in different ways, respective to the rate of growth they endure. A slowly evolving organization may not have such a drastic change in organizational culture in such a short period. Rather, organizational members may be able to adapt to a slower rate of change. Therefore organizations that experience a large amount of rapid growth in a short amount

of time may have the hardest time establishing clear and effective communication, and fostering a positive and industrious culture.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The narrow scope of this study creates several limitations for its applicability to other organizations. Studying one organization does not provide insight into every organization; however, it does provide a basis for comparison as a sensitizing device. The case of the LAF provides a standard for growth that may not be comparable to other organizations due to several environmental factors. Its relationship with a celebrity athlete during his rise to fame invariably affected the rate of growth at LAF. The faddish popularity of the LiveStrong wristband created an unexpected spike in constituency and visibility that many organizations are unlikely to experience. The growth of the LAF was not unexpected; the rate of growth of the organization, however, may create a scenario that is unique to LAF.

The design of the study also engenders limitations. Participants were chosen based on their tenure with and level within the organization, which creates a small pool from which to pull. The sample size, while representative of nearly one-third of the organization's members, may have been too small to be representative of the experience of all members. Additionally, relying on an organizational member to choose participants rather than a random sample may have skewed data. Involving the organization's leaders in gaining access to the site was necessary; however, having leaders involved in the project may have made participants unwilling to fully disclose opinions or experiences for fear of exposure. Relying on self-report interview data also

relies on participants' perceptions and recollections, and not on actual behavior witnessed in the organization.

This case study is intended as a basis for comparison against other organizations in order to better understand the impact of organizational growth on communication. Without further experiences to compare to, one can only theorize about the experiences of this organization and the conclusions of this study. Further, longitudinal studies of organizations throughout several stages in the life cycle may provide more insight into whether these findings are unique only to the growth phase, or indeed, unique only to the LAF. Current writings on organizational growth from other disciplines hint that this is not the case; however, further research on communication is necessary to know for sure.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings regarding organizational growth and communication at LAF provide several opportunities for comparison that could lead to theory-building for organizational communication scholars. Should several organizations describe similar scenarios, such as struggles to promote inter-departmental communication between teams or the implementation of ICTs to promote new methods of communication, models of communication during periods of growth might lead to applied knowledge for organizational practitioners. These data create a stepping stone for further research on the challenges of organizations to facilitate effective communication throughout the stages of the lifecycle process.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

Name:

Title:

Tenure with LAF:

Tell me a little bit about what you do in the organization.

Has your job function changed at all since you started with LAF? When, how?

What drew you to work for this organization?

The organization has grown exponentially over the last 24 months --

Has this impacted how you feel about the organization? Has it impacted how you work?

How much impact does the mission of the organization have on your work? Does LAF's nonprofit status influence your work or your feelings about working here?

Do you enjoy working here? How satisfied are you with your work?

How do you generally communicate with coworkers? Phone, email, face to face?

Has this changed in the last 24 months?

Do you communicate with constituents, board members, or volunteers? How? Has this changed in the last 24 months?

What is the general attitude among your peers towards this period of growth? Has it been a positive change? Are there negative aspects?

To what do you attribute this period of growth? Is it the normal lifecycle of any organization? The Mission? The bracelets? Lance? Is this generalizable to other organizations?

Has there been a lot of turnover in the last 24 months?

How has technology impacted the organization's growth? Your Job? Internal/External Communication?

How does the organization measure its growth? Constituents? Dollars? Employees?

How do you measure effectiveness? Does growth equal effectiveness?

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